DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 291 419 JC 880 064

AUTHOR Abili, Khodi
TITLE A Two-Year Comprehensive Community College Model for Developing Nations: A Case of Iran.
PUB DATE Jan 88
NOTE 22p.; Excerpted from Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Dissertations/Theses - Doctoral Dissertations (041)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Admission; College Curriculum; *Community Colleges; *Educational Assessment; *Educational Development; Educational Finance; Foreign Countries; *Labor Force Development; Models; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Iran

ABSTRACT

A three-part discussion is provided of the applicability of the comprehensive two-year community college model to Iran. Part I provides an overview of Iran's current economic status and manpower needs, the advantages that the development of a community college system would afford the country, the specific educational needs that could be met by a two-year postsecondary educational system, and the measures that would need to be taken to ensure the success of the institutions. Part II examines the components of the proposed community college model, focusing on (1) admissions policy, which would be more flexible than that of the existing colleges and universities in Iran, but more selective than the "open door" institutions in the United States; (2) institutional control and finance, which would follow a U.S. model of local control and institutional autonomy, but an Iranian model of central government financing; and (3) comprehensive curricula. Part III offers recommendations concerning the programs that should be offered by the institutions, including transfer education, technical-vocational education, agriculture education, teacher training, adult education, general education, remedial education, and guidance and counseling. Concluding comments stress the need to consider the values of the Iranian people, local customs and traditions, patterns of interaction, and indigenous academic traditions in order to implement the community college model in Iran. (UCM)

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A TWO-YEAR COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY COLLEGE MODEL FOR DEVELOPING NATIONS: A CASE OF IRAN

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Khodi Abili, Ph.D.
Higher and Adult Continuing Education
School of Education
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
January, 1988

JC 880064

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INTRODUCTION

As a three-part series, this article provides a detailed discussion of the development of a two-year comprehensive community college model proposed for Iran. The first part provides an overview of the model and focuses on the reasons for its development and the principles which would guarantee its success in Iran. In the second part, the author takes a detailed look at its proposed components. In the last part, he suggests a series of educational and training programs to be offered by the proposed institutions in order to meet some of the country's local and regional middle-level manpower needs.

Part I: An Overview

Technology and social progress of Iran are dependent upon the formal educational levels attained by Iranian youth. The completion of at least two years of education and training in post-secondary institutions is needed by the majority of Iranian youth, if Iran is to improve its crippled economy. The fact is that unless more and better education is available to greater numbers of people, the Iranian economy and social structure will suffer tremendous damage.

Due to the nature and characteristics of the two-year comprehensive community colleges, which started in the United States and, to some extent, were developed successfully in some developing societies similar to Iran, the author recommends these two-year postsecondary institutions for Iran with certain modifications in order to contribute to the solution of the country's local, regional, and national middle-level employment needs and to meet, as much as possible, the educational and occupational expectations of the Iranian youth in local and regional communities.

There are many reasons, including those based on the findings of a recent

survey conducted by the author and those based on his personal observations, why community colleges could play an important and crucial role in meeting Iran's manpower needs. These resons include:

1. As the result of the recent revolution and the massive destructiveness resulting from the war with Iraq, Iran's future job opportunities are weighed heavily in favor of those jobs which will require technical and scientific knowledge, currently not available in Iran's educational programs.

2. Population growth, in addition to changes in the economy and in the world of work, will require Iran to develop new institutions providing new areas of training.

3. The current economic state of the country also demands special post-secondary institutions which would shorten the period of education and training typical of the university and cultivate both professional and vocational workers.

4. In his recent study, the author found that the majority of Iranian high school seniors, represented by sample population, tend to attend the nearest college. They also indicated that they would attend a two-year postsecondary institution in the region with transfer and job-training programs.

In addition to these reasons why community colleges are needed in Iran, the development of a comprehensive community college system would have the following advantages:

1. The establishment of a comprehensive community college system in Iran is very significant for the growth of its local communities by providing manpower required to meet the demands for different services and production. If these two-year institutions are established in the proper locations, especially in those communities with no other higher education institution, the government can solve the problem of rural-urban migration that has had a severe impact on

the social structure and stabilization in the rural areas where local communities have been facing acute shortage of skilled manpower.

2. The institutional structure of Iran's educational institutions, including colleges and universities, is formal with an imbalance of administrative authority. Therefore, by establishing a community college system with a broader responsibility of the regions and local communities in planning and decision making, the critical needs of the nation, particularly those related to the educational system and poor economy of the "deprived" rural regions and high illiteracy of the local communities would be addressed at a "grass-root" level.

3. One of the greatest advantages of a comprehensive community college system in Iran is the fact that these local post-secondary institutions keep the students at home, an important accomplishment considering that: (a) the economic conditions of many families do not allow them to send their children to big cities for further education; (b) families are closely knit and most of them would prefer their children to study at home; and (c) most of the young people help their family in their daily responsibilities, especially on the farms. Therefore, the presence of a postsecondary institution in the neighborhood would give them the opportunity both to help their families, at least on the weekends, and to go to college and develop skills needed by today's economy of their community and of the country as a whole.

4. Many of the students in the technical programs of Iran's existing colleges and universities come from average or poor families, and from remote villages or small towns that are beginning to change after centuries. These students are bright and they go to the college with a sense of mission. However, they were raised in an environment devoid of modern technology. Thus, they bring into the classroom the limitations of a traditional and nontechnological culture. Community colleges with technical education programs could be an ideal

place for these students.

5. The students in these institutions would contribute to the improvement of the education and economy of the local community through the usage of the educational opportunities provided by these institutions and by their direct participation and involvement in the affairs of their community.

6. Since a very small number of high school graduates can be admitted to the current colleges and universities, due to the lack of adequate human and physical facilities and high competition, the establishment of two-year comprehensive community colleges in various regions of the country would provide the opportunity and easy access for those who do not have the chance to go to university for further education.

7. Due to nature of hands-on experience of the prog-rams offered by the community colleges and the involvement of the community business and industry in the design and development of the college programs, their graduates would require little training at the time of employment.

8. The students would also be given the opportunity to continue their studies in the university in the future through a transfer program so that the wasting of time and money by those who pursue studies in the universities without the necessary background and academic preparation can be reduced.

9. Although the proposed colleges for Iran should be clearly distinguised as two-year postsecondary institutions at the beginning of their development in a community or region, their educational role, however, would be much broader than that of preparing students for the upper division of a four-year college or university. Through their comprehensive offerings, these institutions would be also more prepared and capable of meeting the technical and semi-professional education and training needs of the local communities.

10. The availability of comprehensive educational and training programs at

these proposed institutions, which are not generally provided by the existing colleges and universities, would make them more appealing to the Iranian youth than the existing two-year technical institutes.

11. Localization of these institutions and their appropriate education and hands-on training experience in the fields demanded by various local communities would contribute to filling the gap between educa tional and working environments.

12. Due to the nature of more flexibility and accessibility and partial nonselectivity of the proposed community colleges, they could become the chief means of approaching a universal post-secondary education in Iran in the future. In addition, a wide range of student ability would be presented among those attending these institutions.

13. These local institutions can best serve the local communities by working with other agencies in the community and other communities of the region in arranging for exchange of students with interest and capacity for training in certain specialized programs.

14. The development of these two-year post-secondary institutions would be less costly compared to other types of colleges or universities.

15. Finally, the commitment of the Iranian society to the expansion of opportunity for post-secondary education would be realized significantly through the development of a comprehensive community college system in the country.

Based on the findings of his recent survey and analysis of Iran's available documented plans and projections, the author believes that several educational and training needs of the country could be met at a reasonably low cost by the development of a comprehensive community college system. The specific needs to be met by these two-year comprehensive post-secondary institutions include:

1. The need to educate the public to the value of a middle-level position;

2. The need to extend the educational opportunities for those whose expectations are rising but whose pocketbooks do not permit them to embark upon an extended program of study. Within this group is the manpower potential needed for many of the middle-level programs involved in industrialization;

3. The need for in-service training of employees already on the job;

4. The need for the re-training of those whose jobs become outmoded as the country moves toward be coming an industrial nation;

5. The need to provide services to and help educate the larger community;

Most of the needs and problems reviewed and discussed in this article, particularly those related to middle-level manpower demands of the country, can be well addressed by the development of a two-year comprehensive community college system. However, the development of these institutions in Iran requires the following measures and principles which would guarantee their success:

1. The proposed Iranian community colleges should not be copies of the American community colleges but relevant to the Iranian national context and to the specific needs and requirements of the local communities. In fact, Iran should learn from the United States in regard to its community college concept that each of them has borrowed and copied from its predecessors yet has made its individual contribution and has gradually modeled itself into a unique institution well suited to its time, place, and circumstances.

2. Until the Iranians are informed of the benefits and rather unique functions of these postsecondary institutions and are convinced of their intrinsic worth and importance and the value of the middle-level positions, the proposed community college model will be difficult to be incorporated into the Iranian educational system and, as a result, the possibility for their success would be minimal. Therefore, these institutions should form a clear identity

with the Iranian society. Their functions should be adequately understood by all those who are engaged in education: by national and provincial educational officials whose authority, resources, and leadership are required for the success of these institutions; by both these proposed colleges and four-year postsecondary institutions of regions for a better division of labor in higher education; and by people and agencies of local communities. A national campaign should be mounted to inform the public of the importance of these postsecondary institutions and careers to which they lead, and to help them recognize the nature of these colleges and appreciate their role as a vital factor for future develop ments of education in the country.

3. Since the decisions regarding to the establishment of postsecondary institutions in Iran are made centrally through the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, the desire, commitment, and financial support of the central government are key factors for the successful development of a community college system in Iran. In addition, unlike some of the American community colleges which were developed in relatively unplanned, unsystematic mode, relying heavily on local tax bases, the development of these institutions in Iran should be emphasized in the overall postsecondary educational planning of the country.

4. With the goal of serving local needs and priorities, the proposed Iranian community colleges should be located where they will enroll a large number of students to permit the development of comprehensive programs. Colleges which are very small will not be able to provide a comprehensive program. In rural areas, priority should be given to rural community needs in order to balance the benefit of the system and to provide for its influence on balanced economic development. However, the size of the high school population and employment capacity of the region should be considered seriously in deciding the location of a community college in the region.

5. There should be a close relationship between these institutions and regional major universities for exchanging students and educational staff and facilities. It should be understood from the beginning that the proposed community college in a region does not mean that other types of postsecondary institutions in the region would give up their lower division work. The challenge would not be how the proposed institution should take the place of other institutions in a region, but rather how it should take its place among them. Therefore, the proposed college and other post secondary institutions in a region should talk together and get to know each other through a joint council which would meet regularly to explore possibilities of increased cooperation.

6. There should be also close coordination between these colleges, local business community, and other local agencies in order to (a) make their programs more cost effective and (b) provide their students with internship and employment opportunities.

7. There should be also a close working relation and curriculum articulation between the proposed institutions and local high schools in a region.

8. It should be recognized that the problems and challenges facing the future development of community colleges in Iran would be complex; they cannot be developed overnight; and all parties should be involved in finding the solutions.

9. Finally, the key to Iran's progress lies in our efforts to emancipate our thinking in a bold way, to carry out reform with determination, and to make new inventions with courage.

Part II: Components

A proposed two-year comprehensive community college model for Iran, as an alternative to the nations's present postsecondary institutions, aims specific-

ally at fulfilling Iran's education and manpower needs as determined by its cultural and historical heritage, within the limits set by its economic and human resources. The model will be discussed in terms of its three componenents: (a) admission policy, (b) control and finance, and (c) comprehensiveness. For each component of the model, the following questions will be discussed:

1. What do these components look like in American community colleges?
2. What would these components look like in Iranian situation based on Iran's political and educational structure and economic limitations?

a. Admission Policy

Accessibility is the key word in defining the functions and development of American community colleges. These institutions, as the most recent form of American postsecondary institutions and as a distinctly American phenomenon, have been established to provide the greater public with a wider access to higher education and an equal educational opportunity for those who had not had that opportunity before. These institutions are accessible almost to everybody: adults, part-timers, dropouts, low-income families, and those with no high school diploma or with poor high school records.

Their nonselectivity also makes them available for those who otherwise would not have the opportunity. Their admission requirements are nonselective in philosophy as well as in practice. Their open-door admission policy is based on the educational philosophy that community college should develop programs to meet the needs of the youth and adults of the community, rather than on the less flexible attitude that higher education is a "defined commodity" from which only a restricted number of individuals can profit.

The proposed community colleges for Iran should have a more flexible admission policy than the existing colleges and universities in order to make

college education more accessible to both college-age and adult students. Although the ideal policy would be a clear road from high school to the community college and the provision of equal educational opportunity for all people of the community, not just for the intellectually and economically privileged few, however, due to the current economic limitations, lack of adequate educational facilities, and excessive number of high school graduates, the ideal "open-door" policy typical to the American community college model is impractical for Iran. In general, the admission requirements to these colleges should be based on the size and type of programs offered by these colleges and the type of educational and manpower needs of the local communities of the region where such institutions are located. More specifically, only local students should be admitted to these institutions based on (a) their successful completion of high school, (b) the relevance of their high school and college fields of study, (c) their personal interest in the field, (d) the nature and type of manpower needs of the local communities, and (e) the local employment opportunities for graduates of these colleges.

b. Control and Finance

The American tradition has been for local control of community colleges. Most of their policy decisions are made at the local level. For a majority of them local control means that they are publicly governed and their governing boards are made up predominantly from the regions served. Their board of trustees are either appointed by the governor of the state, or they are under the provision of city, county, or other local public school districts. There are still those who are elected by the people who live in the community college district, created by the legal action of citizens themselves. Local control also means that the college is responsible to the desires, needs, and ambitions of

the residents of the region served. Therefore, its programs evolve out of specific needs of the people in the community.

Another distinct characteristic of American community colleges is their financial support. In this respect, variations are as wide as they are in matter of control. Some are supported by state appropriations; others receive state assisance and local tax revenues; still others depend wholly on local tax sources and student tuitions. In general, state subsidies, student tuition and fees, and local prpperty taxes are the major sources of revenue for American community colleges. However, federal funding for certain operating purposes and private donations are other but small sources of income for these institutions.

This local control and support of American community colleges is in contrast to the highly centralized decision making in Iran where the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education makes the decisions and controls the centralized financing for all types of post-secondary institutions. In addition, the absence of local governing boards and a direct local taxation in Iran are other obstacles for the support and control of these post-secondary institutions by local communities.

Although the need for a national system of education in Iran with proper coordination and articulation should not be overlooked, however, the central government is too remote to exercise an efficient control over education throughout the nation. The responsibility for the education of the people should rest with the various regions and communities while supervised by the central government. The local communities should be given more autonomy in planning and developing their educational institutions and programs. Therefore, the author believes that there should be a national community college system in Iran. Through the provincial education boards, the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education should be responsible for the supervision and regulation of these

institutions, but they should be locally controlled. Internally, various divisions of the institution should have adequate autonomy in order to be able to use their maximum efforts in acheiving the overall goals of the institution.

Athough these institutions are proposed to be controlled at provincial and local levels, however, because of (a) Iran's indirect taxing system, (b) its national financing system of higher education, and (c) poor economic conditions of most of its local communities, the central government should finance these institutions. Moreover, the local business and industry should be encouraged to support these institutions as they meet the educational and trainig needs of their employees.

c. Comprehensiveness

The basic commitment of American community colleges to offering broad and comprehensive programs in order to serve students with wide range of interests, ages, and abilities is another unique and essential characteristic of these two-year colleges. The earlier American community colleges were two-year institutions, paralleling the freshman and sophmore years of the older four-year colleges and offering similar types of instruction. But over the years, they have proved capable of wide variations in their functions. Present-day community colleges continue to prepare high school graduates to enter the junior year of a four-year college, but this is only one of their major objectives and functions. They are involved with the provision of a variety of educational and training programs and opportunities to their students.

The success of the proposed community colleges for Iran would be dependent upon their flexibility in providing new courses and programs to meet the various and changing needs and interests of the individual students and those of the communities. Flexible programs could be modeled so that students would have the

opportunity to proceed to higher levels of education and employment and thus personal satisfaction. The goal should be to serve students in every possible way, including the provision of practical, job-related programs and counseling services. These programs should be locally devised and closely tied to the regional and local employment opportunities.

Part III: Programs

In order to address the postsecondary education and middle-level manpower needs of local communities, a proposed community college system for Iran should offer two-year programs divided into two groups: (a) those programs which would likely have priority in rural areas, such as agriculture education, teacher training, and remedial education; and (b) those programs which would have greater relevance in urban population centers, such as technical vocational education. Therefore, in varying degrees of priority and emphasis to be determined locally and regionally, the following programs are thus recommended for a future two-year comprehensive community college system in Iran:

Transfer Education

The majority of Iranian high school students intend to continue their education after high school. Therefore, the programs offered at the proposed comprehensive community colleges in Iran should reflect not only the middle-level manpower needs of the local communities, but also the postsecondary education aspirations of the local high school graduates. Thus, the graduates of the proposed community colleges in Iran should be able to transfer to universities if there is a need for their further education in the community, so long as the student's field of specialization at the community college and university correspond, and the student is qualified. However, in order to avoid the bad ex-

periences of other nations, including the United States, in terms of the transfer programs of their community colleges, there should be careful planning and precise articulation of the process of transfer as agreed upon by universities in order to insure the proper matching of transfer students with advanced institutions. There is also a need for careful articulation of requirements, especially course and instructional responsibility, so there is the least possible overlap, the most cost effective operation, and an assurance of smooth transition for the student in terms of curriculum and bureaucratic management.

The work experience requirement should also be considered seriously before the student could continue his education and training at a four-year college or university. This requirement is fundamental because (a) the student would be able to use his practical experience in his further education, and (b) the nation's short-term middle-level manpower needs could be met.

Technical-Vocational Education

The current educational system of Iran, particularly its postsecondary education, is not work-oriented and it is often regarded as a way to avoid manual labor. While there are some two-year technical institutes in the country, only very few of them, mainly located in the capital city of Tehran, appear to be operating adequately and appropriately with their given mission. In general, they are plagued with (a) staffing issues; (b) inadequate facilities; (c) located largely in big cities; (d) student distribution not wide enough geographically; (e) bias against girls; (f) high dropout rate; and (g) underutilization of facilities.

In the light of the present-day employment statistics in most developing nations, particularly Iran, the potential role of the proposed community colleges in providing occupational education becomes clear. The unemployment rate in Iran, especially after the recent revolution and as the result of the

war with Iraq, is very high. It is even higher in the rural areas and among the uneducated and dropouts. This high rate of unemployment is especially tragic when compared with the demand for semi-professional, technical workers. Therefore, an important task of these postsecondary institutions in Iran will be to provide vocational and technical programs which would prepare the community residents to fill vacancies in the related fields. They should function to develop middle-level manpower for careers in industry, oil, agriculture, business, service occupations, and to be geared to the regional and national economic needs of the country.

The occupational competency or employability implies that the programs offered by these two-year institutions should be designed specifically to fit the demands of certain occupational areas. Since it is not feasible, for various reasons, that any one community college offer all possible occupational programs, it is important the employment needs of the region and the community served by the college be addressed and the programs be suited to these needs.

Finally, the levels of education in Iran should also be restructured to enhance a vocational emphasis. In addition to establishing these two-year postsecondary institutions with a strong technical/vocational orientation, the secondary level education should also give a special attention to vocational training as well.

Agriculture Education

Agriculture is still the principal economic activity for the majority of Iranians. Because of the importance of agriculture in the country's economy, it has always been accorded a high priority in the development plans of the past regime and even the new government. However, problems such as technical ignorance, cultural superstitions, poor seeds, poor implements and methods of cultivation, inadequate communication and transportation, and poor market

facilities have hampered the agricultural reforms in the country in spite of the several land reform plans in the past.

Therefore, the aim of community college education in the rural areas of Iran should be to aid rural people in coping with the process of change through provision of new skills and knowledge. Thus, they should be regarded as learning centers where villagers can get help to assess their problems and needs, to identify resources, and to work with others in the community to improve their standard of living and their quality of life.

In rural areas, there is also a continued demand for well-trained agricultural technicians both in production agriculture and in related agricultural occupations. Therefore, there needs to be greater emphasis on training for agricultural occupations in these rural institutions since this field can provide many of the job opportunities for rural residents. The programs offered at these institutions have an important role to play in the training of the farmers. Prior to achieving this goal, however, there is a considerable need for better communication between the institution and the related local agricultural industry.

Teacher Training Education

Lack of adequate qualified teachers at all educational levels both in rural and urban areas is a critical problem in Iran. Therefore, two-year teacher-training programs in the fields which are needed in various regions of the country should be included in the programs offered at the proposed comprehensive community colleges in Iran.

Adult Education

Adult education should be another important component of the programs offered by the proposed coprehensive community colleges in Iran. The fact is

that in developing societies, including Iran, there are large numbers of intelligent citizens who have not had the opportunity for formal education. They are perhaps too old to start school again. There is no doubt that the contribution that they are making to their country's development would be much more effective if they are able to have a course of education designed specially to meet their own needs and to equip them more adequately with the kind of training, knowledge, and education that would enable them to play a role more confidently and effectively in national progress of their country.

In addition, high rate of illiteracy among adults, low level of basic skills, failure of the traditional system of education, a great desire for professional growth and career advancement by many adults, as well as over-crowded urban areas, high rate of unemployment and the overall brain drain are all tied together in developing societies, including Iran, in creating a great demand for adult education program by the proposed community colleges in Iran.

Because of high rate of illiteracy in Iran, particularly in the rural communities, one of the main components of the adult education program in these institutions should be to campaign against illiteracy as much as it is possible and feasible. In the past, literacy problems were not as fully considered as they should have been. New objectives should be formulated for the program in these institutions and the scope and intention of the program should be widened as part of a broader national development plans. This will lead to the achievement of a higher rate of literacy in the communities and, as a result, the cultural, social, and economic advancement of the local communities will be expedited.

General Education

In addition to offering transfer, technical, vocational, agriculture, and adult education courses with the goal of intellectual, personal, and career

growth and development in mind, the curriculum of the proposed comprehensive community colleges in Iran should also include general education courses. Courses in humanities and literature, for example, in which ideas play an important role, should be an essential part of their programs. The reason is that higher education must do more than giving students skills as technicians, engineers, doctors, or chemists. It must also prepare them to deal with the larger responsibilities of their role as community members and as citizens. Narrow fields of specialization, either academic or vocational, would be, therefore, equally unaccpetable in the proposed comprehensive community colleges for Iran.

Remedial Education

There is a growing concern in the developing societies, including Iran, over the low ability of students in the school systems. A rapid increase of high school graduates with an inadequate preparation for college work in the recent past has served to emphasize the problem. Therefore, in keeping with their commitment to an open-door policy, as much as practical, the proposed community colleges in Iran should recognize the problem and offer remedial courses. These courses can have different goals dependent upon the mission and philosophy of the local institution. These goals might include: (a) to help the low-ability students achieve vocational competence; (b) to expose them to the benefits of general education; (c) to remediate them for advanced college work; and (d) to bring all adults to a national minimum standard in order for further education to be also an option for them.

Guidance and Counseling

No comprehensive community college can perform its functions as an open-door institution unless it offers highly skilled and professional student

personnel services. Therefore, there is a need for guidance, counseling, and information services in the proposed comprehensive post-secondary institutions in order to educate the adults about the range of education opportunities available to them and to assist individuals in selecting the programs not only most appropriate to their own needs but also relevant to the needs of their community. In addition, because of the diversity of programs, these colleges should maintain strong guidance services to assist their students, who have various kinds of ability and motivation for further college work, to decide where to go and to find a course of study appropriate to their ability.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The validity and successful implementation of the proposed community college model in Iran will depend on the prior identification of the facts and key cultural elements which act as critical constraints upon the process of modifying the model and relating it to Iranian's socio-cultural context. Therefore, the author believes that the model should be expressed in the context of the values of Iranian people, considering local customs and traditions, and patterns of interactions, and it should take into account their indigenous and other inherited academic traditions. It is equally important that the socially and culturally related attitude of Iranians regarding two-year colleges and middle-level positions and their awareness of the country's urgent needs for semi-professional positions be improved. In addition, due to the nature of the centralized educational system and the possible political threat to the central government, which could be caused by the local control orientation of the proposed model, full understanding, support, and commitment of the Iranian central government is essential in the successful development of the model in Iran.

Finally, the author believes that further study and research is needed for

the successful development and utilization of the model in Iran. Therefore, a task force of both national and local experts should be set up to look into the possibilities of the effective implementation of the model in various regions of the country before any major step is taken.

This article is a portion of the last chapter of the author's Ph.D. Dissertation (July, 1987): The Development of a Two-Year Comprehensive Community College Model for Developing Nations - A Survey-Guided Study of Iran.

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